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Good afternoon Chairmen Fox and Coleman, Ranking Members Rebimbas and Kissel, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 6703: An Act Concerning Youth Violence and Gang Activity.

I would like to thank the Judiciary Committee for raising this important legislation that was proposed by the House Republican Caucus.

Gang violence pervades our urban communities. Gangs are at the root of many of the crimes committed on the streets of our cities. The first step in curbing this violence is to focus efforts on preventing youth from ever becoming involved in gangs. Raised Bill 6703 seeks to address the recruitment of children or youth into participation in gang activity by making it a crime to knowingly encourage, solicit, recruit, intimidate, or coerce a person under eighteen to commit a crime in order to participate in or remain a member of a criminal gang. Washington State recently passed similar legislation because police found that arresting gang members for committing crimes did not go far enough in discouraging gang activity. Once a gang member ended up in prison, the gang simply recruits new youths to join. Prosecutors and police need a tool to criminalize these recruitment procedures. Connecticut already has laws that attempt to prevent youths from joining gangs through education and school suspension. An Act Concerning Youth Violence and Gang Activity would increase those efforts.

I urge the Judiciary Committee to pass House Bill 6703. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and I look forward to the opportunity to debate this bill with the full General Assembly.

Thank you.